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SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP, DRL AND NEA/MEPI  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR FOR JAMES RUDE

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [KMPI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ASSURE AMBASSADOR LAGON OF  
COMMITMENT ON TIP

REF: A. MUSCAT 375

[1](#)B. MUSCAT 822

[1](#)C. MUSCAT 298

[1](#)D. MUSCAT 883

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alfred F. Fonteneau, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador Mark Lagon, Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP), visited Muscat on September 22 to engage Omanis on trafficking and encourage the government to execute measures in the USG's anti-TIP action plan for Oman. Top officials in the Royal Oman Police (ROP), Ministry of Manpower (MOM), and the Public Prosecutor's office expressed their government's commitment to passing comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation this year, and outlined a number of concrete steps that the government already has taken to combat TIP. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Omani officials used their September 22 meetings with Ambassador Mark Lagon to stress that Oman is taking TIP seriously, and that the government has made passage of comprehensive anti-TIP legislation a priority. Zahir Ali al-Hilali, Public Prosecutor, confirmed previous post reporting (refs A, B) that an interagency committee has completed a draft anti-TIP law and that the draft is ready for review and approval by the Council of Ministers - the last step before the promulgation of a royal decree implementing the law. Hilali said that he is slated to become Chairman of Oman's Anti-Trafficking Task Force, which will have broad authority under the law to investigate suspected cases of trafficking in cooperation with the ROP, MOM, Ministry of Justice, and international organizations. He commented that although Oman's labor law and penal code already provide a strong legal foundation to combat commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor and other types of trafficking, pending anti-TIP legislation will provide his office with a comprehensive tool to address these crimes.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Minister of Manpower Juma bin Ali al-Juma, saying candidly that "Anyone can pass an (anti-trafficking) law - that is not enough," stated that his Ministry has moved ahead with a number of actions aimed at reducing foreign workers' vulnerability to abuse. The Ministry, for example, has enhanced its capacity to inspect workplace conditions by hiring 160 new labor inspectors, 100 of whom participated in an International Labor Organization (ILO) training program that included a special session on TIP. In order to provide MOM inspectors with the means to investigate allegations of contract fraud and non-payment of wages, the Ministry issued a Ministerial Decision this year requiring employers to pay their workers by direct deposit through Oman's banks (ref C). Further, the Ministry continues to run its 24-hour abuse

hotline, which, the Minister said, fielded almost 2,000 calls in 2007, 786 of which were from expatriate workers. Finally, Juma showed Ambassador Lagon draft copies of brochures in multiple languages outlining worker rights and responsibilities, which he said the MOM - in cooperation with the ROP - plans to begin distributing to foreign workers at airports and other points of entry. In his office and at a later reception for Ambassador Lagon, Juma stressed his personal commitment to stand up for the rights of workers, both Omani citizens and expatriates.

¶4. (C) The Deputy Inspector General of the ROP, Major General Salim bin Musallam bin Ali Qatan, was decidedly more defensive than his colleagues on TIP. He disputed notions that TIP was a problem of any significance in Oman, repeatedly asking for specific examples of abuse, even interrupting his interpreter at one point to ask, "Where? Where is this happening?" In response to Ambassador Lagon's recommendation that Oman establish a screening mechanism to identify victims of TIP who would not otherwise identify themselves, Qatan stated that the ROP already interviews foreign workers who are being deported, or who are seeking to depart Oman before the end of their employment contract, to determine if they were victims of exploitation. While he said that the ROP has investigated isolated cases based on these exit interviews, he reiterated that he has seen no evidence of a widespread problem. However, he emphasized the ROP's commitment to enforcing existing laws as well as future comprehensive anti-TIP legislation.

¶5. (C) Comment: As expected, officials were defensive at times about their country's record on combating TIP and skeptical about the actual extent of the problem in Oman (ref D). Despite this, they were willing to engage Ambassador Lagon on specific issues related to prevention, prosecution

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and victim protection, indicating that the government is beginning to grapple with the complicated nature of the crime. While noting the steps needed to fulfill the USG's action plan, Ambassador Lagon characterized the U.S. stance and Oman's new efforts to combat TIP as stemming from a shared commitment to justice. Overall, the Ambassador's visit helped raise awareness about TIP among influential members of the government and created avenues for future discourse.

¶6. (U) Ambassador Lagon cleared this cable.  
FONTENEAU